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SUGGESTIONS ON THE READING OF LATIN AUTHORS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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A careful survey of the course of study in Latin in preparatory and high schools shows that, in general, the reading is confined to three authors, Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil. To these we add, occasionally, Ovid, Nepos, and Sallust. Of Caesar, four to eight books of the *Gallic War*, and, now and then, the *Civil War* are presented; of Cicero, six to fourteen orations; of Vergil, six to twelve books of the *Aeneid*. Now, if we compare with this the courses of study in modern languages, a huge contrast appears. Thus, a pupil who pursues German for four years becomes acquainted with representative works of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and Heine; with lesser poets, such as Uhland, Rückert, and the like; with prose writers such as Freytag, Hauff, Grimm, and Hoffmann. The question arises why Latin literature, with its Livy, Seneca, Pliny, Catullus, Juvenal, and a host of writers who have profoundly impressed their marks on succeeding ages, has grown to be confined, in secondary schools, to the *Gallic War*, the *Aeneid*, and the *Orations* of Cicero. That is to say, Latin has suffered as if English literature were to be confined to the campaigns of Wellington, the *Paradise Lost*, and Burke's speeches.

The reasons of the confined study of Latin are varied and without any substantial basis of reason. For, in the first place, Latin is looked upon primarily as a drill in grammar. Again, the teachers themselves are not the masters of their subjects as they ought to be. Furthermore, it is believed that reading as much as possible of a single author, and that, too, of a single work of that author, is the only way of gaining a proper mastery of Latin literature. And lastly, the cogent reason, that superintendents demand certain fixed programmes, the colleges require them, and the publishing houses will issue no other texts.

Latin is more than a drill in grammar. It can, and should, be made a vehicle for the interpretation of the genius of that people

which has stamped its system of law and government upon the western nations. Its literature, considered as pure literature, is majestic, ethical, classic; Plautus and Terence inspired English comedy; Seneca and Horace have influenced tragedy by example and precept; Vergil has guided not Dante alone; Quintilian is mighty as rhetorician and educator. You cannot understand the development of the Christian church without the study of the genius of Rome. Why should Latin be but a drill in grammar?

Caesar's *Commentaries* will always remain the model of the military memoir for their precision, their sustained elegance; the study of the tribes who formed the nucleus of modern nations never fails to interest the student; the Roman methods of conquering, their processes of warfare, always attract attention and eager inquiry. But they are as poor that surfeit with too much, as they who starve on nothing; and to force three, four, and even five books of Caesar on a boy or girl is a crime. Would any German teacher spend a year on the campaigns of Frederick the Great? The moment that the reading of an author is pushed to satiety and becomes a painful repetition of the same dreary details, as of battles, sieges, and battles again, at that moment literature ceases to inspire and produces a reaction against the literature which the author represents.

Nothing is more unfortunate than the treatment of Cicero in our secondary schools. For the *Orations* do not represent Cicero's real greatness. He is the humanist, who interpreted Greek philosophy for the Western world; he is a human man, whose letters throw a fascinating light on contemporaneous political and social life. In his *Orations* he has set a false standard for men. He is insincere, he is egotistical to the point of madness. He eulogized Caesar, and applauded his murderers; he impeached Verres, but he also defended Milo and Cluentius. He obscures the truth in grandiloquent language. We have grown out of that point of view. We wish the truth; and the truth may be expressed as grandly as a lie; witness the sublime simplicity of the Bible, or Lincoln's Gettysburg speech. Now, no audience has a keener sense of the fitting than the boys or girls of adolescent age; they penetrate at once the weaknesses of Cicero; and they are given no opportunity to observe his other side. And as they plod drearily through oration after oration they grow to hate

Latin literature, and they believe most firmly that all Latin must be similar; and also that the Roman, in his daily speech, regularly conversed in periodic rhetoric.

Why confine Vergil to the *Aeneid*? Is not the music of the *Eclogues* worth attention? Why not drop the last six books of the *Aeneid*, the artificial, though wonderfully artistic, adaptations of Greek originals, and contemplate for a while the Fourth Eclogue, and Virgil's unique position as a magician during the Middle Ages? Does any English teacher read the whole of *Paradise Lost*, with no consideration of *Lycidas*? And does any mature student care to read the last six books of the *Aeneid* at one continuous stretch? But we force boys and girls to do so.

The result of our present system of presenting Latin is that the Roman world is plunged into the same mystic and unhuman atmosphere which surrounded it during the Middle Ages. It will be worth while for any teacher to take his or her juniors and seniors some day and question them as to their ideas of Roman life and literature. The results are always interesting, though not soothing. To cite but one example: the average student believes quite naturally that the Roman conversed exactly as Cicero and Vergil wrote, using the same elaborate word order, the same flowery language. Hence the Roman appears as a Being fearfully and wonderfully made, who spent most of his time in devising knotty grammar for posterity. And yet a week devoted to reading from the Vulgate would quickly disabuse the student; the Vulgate was written for the great masses, not a cultivated nobility alone; and it seems to me extraordinary that this chance has been so long overlooked for making boys and girls acquainted at once with the Bible and with the spoken language of the average Roman.

I meet at once with the objection that I am trying to make Latin interesting at the expense of hard work. Such has never been my practice; and the make-it-pleasant-and-easy method of teaching is as distasteful to me as to anyone. But I assert positively that, at the end of two, or at most three years of Latin, a student who has been rightly drilled should be ready to read at a fair pace and to have enough grammar to last for the next four years of study, if he desires to continue the language. It is in the junior and the senior years that I

plead for greater variety, much more than during the first two or three. No one insists more firmly on a solid foundation of grammar than I do.

Again, the assertion is made that the vocabulary, say, of Pliny and of Seneca, is too difficult for a high-school student. That assertion is nonsense; for I have had juniors and seniors read selections from these authors with less trouble than from Cicero.

The idea that one must read the whole *Aeneid* to appreciate Vergil, or seven books of the *Gallic War* to understand Caesar, is perhaps the weakest statement of the many fallacious arguments of the old school. Far from leading to appreciation, too much of an author becomes a deadly bore. And it is unfair to the author. Cicero wrote also some charming essays, and some still more interesting letters; and to prevent the student from observing his author in all his different aspects is most unjust to that writer.

I do not believe that every boy and girl should study Latin; but I hold firmly that, if Latin is taught, it should be presented more broadly. The language is, indeed, on the defensive. Botany, zoölogy, meteorology, Esperanto, and other vital studies, which are so marvelously practical, tend to crowd it back. If Nature has intended a boy to be a blacksmith, let him study blacksmithing; but if he has a capacity for literature, let him not be driven from that literature which is vitally interwoven with our modern; let him not gain the impression that Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil are all there is.

I once asked a teacher of the old school why so many authors were studied in French and German, and only three in Latin. To this he replied that he would not give a snap of the finger for the results achieved in modern-language work; and he cited in support that an eminent professor of modern languages of Harvard had said the same. The worthy old schoolmaster was mistaken. The Harvard professor had not attacked the reading of many authors; he had attacked the sloppy way in which those authors were studied.

Many teachers agree with me that more variety is desirable; but they point to the fact that Yale, Princeton, Williams, every college except Harvard, demand the four books of Caesar, the six orations of Cicero, and the six books of the *Aeneid*; and they ask, "What can we do?" Well, if teachers were not so afraid of expressing their opinions, perhaps Yale and her little sisters would some day awake

to the fact that translation at sight is the only true test of ability in Latin, as all acknowledge it is in German and French. Any bright boy can "trot out" his prescribed Cicero in a month and pass the examination. I have seen it done repeatedly.

I therefore suggest the following as a five-years' course in Latin reading. It represents what I do myself; but I do not intend it to be a fixed and unalterable thing. Each teacher's own discretion will be his tutor.

I. FIRST LATIN BOOK

Easy passages in a book like Collar and Daniell's *Gradatim*.

II. FIRST LATIN BOOK—REVIEW

Caesar, *Gallie War* ii (using first, perhaps, Collar's *Gate to Caesar*).

At sight: *Gradatim*; Eutropius.

It is in these first two years that the essentials of grammar must be mastered thoroughly, as an indispensable basis of further progress; the second book of the *Gallie War* will offer rich illustrations of grammatical principles; and the pupil may well begin to acquire some confidence in reading at sight. My experience has convinced me that boys and girls in the second year can read more at sight than is generally supposed. If this course, as outlined above, has been carried out, the student is ready to read historical prose of average difficulty without too much trouble; and I suggest:

III

Caesar, *Gallie War* 12-23 of v (on Britain), with other selections from the *Gallie War* or from the *Civil War*.

Tacitus, *Agricola* 10-17 (on Britain).

Cicero, two of the Catilines.

Sallust, *Catiline* (omitting, perhaps, the introduction).

At sight: Selections from Caesar, or the easier parts of Sallust's *Jugurtha*.

IV

Vergil *Aeneid* i, ii, iii, and iv.

Pliny, *Letters* vi. 16 and 20 (eruption of Vesuvius), and x. 96 (on the Christians).

At sight: Select Letters of Cicero; the Vulgate.

V

Vergil, *Aeneid* vi.

Juvenal, Satire viii.

Cicero, *De Amicitia*, and *Milo*.

At sight: Seneca—selections; Ovid.

I have drawn up a course of five years, inasmuch as that seems the favorite length of the study in most schools. To repeat what I

have already remarked: every pupil is not fitted for the study of Latin, nor need it be a compulsory study; but if it is taught, it ought to be presented on a broader basis. If teachers will assert themselves on the matter more vigorously than they do, we shall see that suitable texts of the authors of whom I have spoken will soon follow. The *Roman Life in Latin Prose and Verse* of Messrs. Peck and Arrow-smith long ago appeared and is not well enough known. In conclusion, I should like to remark that because a certain system of reading Latin has been in vogue for a thousand years it does not necessarily mean it is the right one. President Eliot has taught us some things about stereotyped pedagogy.